**A quest for zero hunger**

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Being a third world country, the aftermath of the pandemic saw Pakistan capitulate to the plague known as food insecurity. Pakistan has always been in a one-sided tussle with hidden hunger and the pandemic exacerbated this situation by manifold. This, together with the depreciating value of the Pakistani rupee, has left the nation at the cusp of a malnutrition emergency, impeding social and economic wellbeing and proving to be a bane for children, young women and the elderly in particular.

According to statistics, Pakistan is ranked as the fifth most populated country in the world with a perpetually growing population. Couple this with an increase in poverty levels and a lack of food production and what we are left with is severe food insecurity and increased malnourishment. Pakistan’s population has the highest growth rate in all of South Asia, soaring to 2.4 percent and with about 40 percent of the populace hovering below the poverty line, it is expected that the GDP will decline and adversely affect production and agriculture within Pakistan. The International Food Security Assessment 2021-31 made by the United States department of Agriculture revealed that 38 percent of the Pakistani populace was “food insecure”, which was also surprisingly the highest in all of South Asia as well. This means that more than 90 million Pakistani citizens aren’t able to meet even the basic necessity in life which is food—to put into better context, a population larger than Germany is living in severe multidimensional poverty within Pakistan. It is shocking to see when all of Pakistan’s neighboring countries have food insecurity levels far below that of Pakistan’s; with Bangladesh having 25.7 percent, Sri Lanka with 19.4percent, Nepal with 13.6 percent and India with 25.8 percent. This also means that Pakistan has the largest food gap as well among the entire South Asia too.

[Pakistan logs 10 Covid deaths, 270 fresh cases in 24 hours](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/pakistan-logs-10-covid-deaths-270-fresh-cases-in-24-hours)

The ever increasing food price inflation is another factor when considering such alarming rates of food insecurity. The rising food prices have caused the purchasing power to drop by 18.5 percent. Food security has a deep link to the income of the country as well and a drop in income during the Covid-19 may increase food insecurity.

To adequately address the high levels of food insecurity, it is imperative for the PTI government to implement measures to effectively control the high population growth first. The fight to control this rapid rise in population has always been a wild goose chase for previous governments but the incumbent government can tackle this issue by taking an example from several countries such as China and try to improve existing legislation that encompasses population and birth control. By implementing strict population control laws, food security levels can increase as well.

Statistics have always considered Pakistan to be an agricultural country but such high levels of food uncertainty paint a different picture for our crop production. This is certainly very intriguing when we think of ourselves as a country with a strong agriculture sector but fail to even provide enough food—as evidenced by the fact that the country has one of the highest prevalence rates for malnutrition. This leaves more than 33 percent of children underweight and 44 percent stunted. This comes to show how growth in the agriculture sector can help to eliminate hunger. The government’s inclusion of agriculture as a top priority in the second phase of CPEC is a very fruitful prospect. It is therefore very important how the PTI government utilises the funds provided from China for this purpose. By investing in the supply chain and introducing new infrastructure, better transport systems and tools, the government could help prevent food harvest losses which have been the bane for farmers due to poor infrastructure, mishandling of perishable crops and subpar transportation systems. The government should also try to take measures in order to avoid political and economic volatility when it comes to addressing improvements in the agricultural sector. At times, the political monopoly of local politicians and landlords fosters hunger and food insecurity in several malnourished rural areas of Pakistan. As per the National Food Security Policy 2018 and Agriculture Transformation Plan 2021, finishing food insecurity is a high priority for Pakistan’s development agenda. The government should provide soft loans to the farmers for this and also provide insurance packages to farmers whose crops get afflicted with pests.

[Sheikh Rasheed’s elder brother passes away](https://nation.com.pk/17-Nov-2021/sheikh-rasheed-s-elder-brother-passes-away)

In recent times, Pakistan has turned into a food surplus nation however, a substantial portion of our population is suffering through debilitating food insecurity and malnutrition. The government back in 2018 did pledge to fulfil all of the global goals by 2030 and one of which is zero hunger. In order to reach ‘zero hunger’ the government should eliminate food insecurity for good from this country. If Imran Khan is looking to complete all of the sustainable development goals, then alleviating hunger and food insecurity should be his top priority as we are an agricultural country—if we take the right steps, we could eliminate hunger and create a ‘zero hunger’ nation in no time.

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